

Executive Summary

OVERVIEW

THE ROCKVILLE'S PIKE NEIGHBORHOOD Plan is an update of a portion of the City's 2002 Comprehensive Master Plan (CMP) and replaces the 1989 *Rockville Pike Neighborhood Corridor Plan*. It establishes and communicates a vision for how Rockville's portion of the Rockville Pike corridor and adjoining areas can be transformed from an architecturally non-distinctive suburban retail strip into an attractive and vibrant neighborhood for shopping, living, and working. The CMP is an active document. Portions of it are constantly under review and being updated. Amendments may be made to this Rockville's Pike Neighborhood Plan in the future to comply with the goals and objectives of the overall CMP.

An adopted updated plan provides direction, policies and strategies so that the City can coordinate and

collaborate with public and private organizations to achieve the vision. This plan brings forward many of the concepts presented in the 1989 plan, but it also better addresses today's increasingly complex transportation and land use issues. These issues are discussed briefly below and expounded more fully in later chapters.

Regional projections indicate that there will be approximately 11,460 residents and 13,000 jobs in the Plan Area by 2040,¹ compared to about 3,500 residents and 9,000 jobs in 2014. Projected increases would account for about 40% of Rockville's population growth during that timeframe, and approximately 11% of the employment growth. These projections signal the need for a vision and a comprehensive plan for the corridor.

¹ City of Rockville, Department of Community Planning and Development Services, as part of Metropolitan Washington Council of Governments Round 8.2 projections, 2013.

*The 2002
Comprehensive
Master
Plan states:
“Rockville will
continue to
be a city that
emphasizes the
characteristics
of a small town
community,
offers an
excellent quality
of life, provides
a responsive
government
serving its
citizens, and
has a distinct
positive identity
tied to its
history.”*

The plan's focus is the creation of a vibrant and comfortable mixed-use environment, more dense than the current mostly suburban levels, but less than fully urban; supported by strong public amenities and facilities, and complemented by a transportation network that will better support pedestrians, drivers, transit riders, and bicyclists. It takes advantage of Rockville's position as Montgomery County's seat of government in the broader metropolitan region, but retains a distinctive identity for Rockville. Implementation of the plan should broaden the Pike's appeal from an auto-oriented retail strip to a corridor that offers a wider range of transportation choices and an improved land use framework, and enables the area to remain competitive in a changing retail industry.

The plan is the product of an intensive community planning initiative that has incorporated input from citizens, private and public sector leaders, government agencies, consultants, City staff, and other stakeholders. Extensive outreach and publicity efforts have been made throughout the planning process to maximize public knowledge about, and participation in, development of the plan.

The Planning Commission process began in January 2011. The Commission held public hearings on a consultants' draft plan in March 2011 and accepted written testimony from January through September 2011. The Commission spent more than a year in work sessions, revising the consultants' plan based on written and oral testimony. After the Commission released its first revised draft in March 2013, a second round of public hearings was held and additional written testimony was received, followed by more work sessions, resulting in a June 2014 draft.

That draft was made available to the public and to the Mayor and Council for comments. The Mayor and Council held five public hearings between September 2014 and March 2015 and several work sessions. The Mayor and Council sent a list of suggested edits to the Planning Commission on April 1, 2015. The Planning Commission considered the Mayor and Council's suggestions and continued work on the draft, resulting in the Planning Commission's Plan in March 2016.

THE PLAN AREA

The Plan Area contains approximately 382 acres, on both sides of and including a 1.98-mile portion of Rockville Pike (Maryland State Route 355). It is bounded on the north by Richard Montgomery Drive and on the south by the City's corporate limits, near Bou Avenue. Boundaries on the western side include Wootton Parkway, the Woodmont Country Club and East Jefferson Street. The eastern boundary is the Metrorail right-of-way.

This Plan recommends that a study of land use, transportation and other key issues and challenges be completed for the MD 355 corridor and adjoining areas to the north of the City, within the context of the update to other portions of the Comprehensive Master Plan (CMP).

EXISTING ISSUES AND CHALLENGES

Rockville's Pike addresses key issues and challenges identified by both the public and technical analysis during the planning process.

TRANSPORTATION AND ACCESS

Rockville Pike serves both as a regional “highway” and a local road serving local businesses and residents. This dual function creates multiple conflicts, especially in the outer (right) lanes. The Pike is highly congested at times, with some intersections already exceeding City standards for certain periods of the week. Traffic volume will likely increase as growth continues along the MD 355 corridor and as the area south of Rockville redevelops at high densities.

Pedestrian and bicycle conditions are poor, and often feel unsafe. Sidewalks are narrow, located uncomfortably close to fast-moving traffic, and frequently separated from businesses by expansive parking lots. There are limited opportunities to safely cross the Pike due to long distances between signalized intersections and inadequate pedestrian signal timing. Strip shopping centers are designed for cars and are not pedestrian-friendly. Bicycle infrastructure is inadequate and there is no protected bicycle route along or near the Pike. Furthermore, the rail line and the Pike itself limit travel options, especially east-west connectivity. Though Metro's Red Line runs parallel to and near Rockville Pike (there is one stop in the planning area and another just to the north), pedestrian and bicycle access to both stops is difficult, due to poor sidewalks and challenging road crossings.

LAND USE

The predominant land use pattern in the Pike corridor is in the form of individual parcels with single-story buildings occupied by a single use, set far back from the street and surrounded by surface parking lots. This pattern uses a vast amount of land, forces multiple vehicle trips between properties, and contributes to the large total number of car trips. Recent projects have included multi-story residential buildings.

The Pike remains an important retail destination located in a strong regional economic market with significant long-term growth potential. Enhancing the appearance and function of the Pike corridor is important, especially since new competition will be emerging from large-scale growth and development nearby, such as in the White Flint area.

There are no parks or public open spaces for recreation, social gathering, or outdoor enjoyment.

Traffic congestion and lack of available school capacity may delay certain types of redevelopment for portions of the Pike corridor unless necessary infra-

structure, as regulated by the City's adequate public facilities standards, is both funded and provided, or other accommodation is found in those instances.

CORRIDOR PLANNING PRINCIPLES

The *Rockville's Pike* public process led to the identification of a set of corridor planning principles that have guided the formulation of this plan. They are:

A. LIVABLE, DESIRABLE ENVIRONMENT ENHANCED BY THOUGHTFUL URBAN DESIGN

1. Community design and development appropriate to Rockville
2. Mixed uses and new neighborhoods
3. Inviting conditions for walking and biking
4. Appealing parks and public open spaces for community gathering and activity
5. Environmentally friendly and sustainable
6. A distinctive character for Rockville's portion of the corridor
7. Development that is supported by commensurate growth of infrastructure

B. MULTIMODAL TRANSPORTATION

1. Smooth and safe vehicular flow
2. Safe and accessible pedestrian and biking infrastructure and experience
3. Access and movement choices for all travel modes that provide connections within the corridor and with surrounding areas
4. Efficient and reliable local and regional public transportation options
5. Easy-to-navigate environment

C. ECONOMIC VIABILITY

1. Retention and attraction of local and national retail
2. City support for successful development
3. Financeable infrastructure and fiscally responsible implementation

PLAN POLICIES FOR TRANSPORTATION AND LAND USE

TRANSPORTATION POLICIES

The Transportation Policies seek to support both the Transportation and Land Use visions of the plan to make the corridor more sustainable and more accessible for multiple modes of travel.

1. **Redesign and Reconstruct Rockville Pike as a Multi-Way Boulevard.**

The core recommendation of this plan is to redesign and reconstruct Rockville Pike as a multi-way boulevard. A multi-way boulevard attempts to balance the competing needs of roadway capacity, local access, transit, street parking, bicycle accommodation, and pedestrian comfort. It consists of through lanes for faster-moving traffic and transit; access lanes for slow-moving local traffic, bicycles and on-street parking; wide sidewalks and green medians. The boulevard concept is crucial to meeting the transportation, place-making, and economic goals of the plan and addresses the dual (local and regional) nature of the Pike.

The boulevard design will:

- Separate local and regional trips.
 - Create the conditions for a shift in the transportation modal split along the Pike, from a high degree of reliance on the private automobile to more diverse transportation choices.
 - Make the Pike safer for pedestrians, cyclists and motorists.
 - Integrate the Twinbrook Metro Station into the corridor and make public transit a more attractive option.
 - Allow for the possibility of additional high-capacity transit service along the Pike.
 - Bring transit, walking, and bicycle users closer to the land uses of the Pike, protected from the fast-moving traffic on the main lanes.
 - Reinforce the role of the corridor as a significant retail center in the region.
 - Facilitate the transformation of the corridor into an attractive place by creating a streetscape plan and moving utilities underground.
2. **Expand the street network** to increase connectivity and movement choice, diffuse traffic congestion, create more frequent and convenient crossing opportunities for pedestrians, and create smaller, more pedestrian-friendly blocks.
 3. **Make all roadway projects adhere to the City's Complete Streets Policy** to safely accommodate automobiles, pedestrians, transit users and bicyclists.
 4. **Optimize access to and use of public transit**, including Metrorail, local buses, and, potentially, a new rapid transit service along Rockville Pike.

LAND USE POLICIES

Rockville's Pike integrates the transportation policies with a set of land use policies to guide the transformation of the corridor from an architecturally non-descript automobile-dominated strip to an attractive, walkable place. The proposed land use policies will:

1. **Seek to ensure a comfortable and functional relationship between public infrastructure and the private built environment.** The plan, and the associated development regulations, addresses the relationship between building facades and public infrastructure, the form and mass of buildings in relation to one another, the public spaces formed by the disposition of buildings, and the scale and types of streets and blocks.
2. **Require buildings to be adjacent to sidewalks.** In most locations, buildings will be constructed adjacent to continuous sidewalks to frame the public realm, structure the environment for pedestrians, and position pedestrians where land uses are located. The distance between building faces across the Pike will be reduced from that which was endorsed in the 1989 Pike plan by 18 to 28 feet.
3. **Regulate building height by location.** Maximum building heights serve walkability and economic development objectives by permitting sufficient mixed use density to create vitality, while responding to community concerns about over-development and maintaining a human scale environment. Different height standards are appropriate for different parts of the Plan Area and depend on the specific characteristics of their locations.
4. **Create smaller blocks.** Reducing the size of existing blocks as part of the redevelopment process creates a more finely-developed street network, increases connectivity and movement choices for all travel modes, and provides increased street frontage for land uses.
5. **Provide wide and pleasant sidewalks.** Sidewalks are located immediately next to land uses to encourage inter-site movement (except, perhaps, in the middle and northern parts of the east side of the Pike where sites are very narrow and the full boulevard concept will be difficult to achieve). Sidewalks are wide, continuous and feature amenities such as street trees, benches, bike racks, and places for outdoor restaurant seating.
6. **Enhance the pedestrian environment overall and especially at strategic intersections and on strategic streets.** This plan places emphasis on the treatment of building frontages at strategic intersections to create enlarged pedestrian environments with art, fountains, and other place-making features.
7. **Ensure a mix of uses** to encourage activity in the daytime and evening, reduce dependency on automobiles, provide a balance of residences and employment opportunities, and create a full-service transit-oriented neighborhood around the Twinbrook Metro station.
8. **Ensure adequacy of public facilities,** including transportation, school capacity, water infrastructure, sewer infrastructure, parks, and access to police and fire protection, as critical to maintaining Rockville's excellent quality of life

and a necessary foundation for achieving Smart Growth.

9. **Encourage enduring, human-scale architecture that has visual interest.** The plan does not mandate particular architectural styles, but rather encourages massing and building forms that are visually interesting, contribute to energy on the street, and incorporate human scale detailing.
10. **Provide parks.** There are no parks in the Plan Area now. The need exists and this need will grow as the number of people living and working in the Plan Area increases.
11. **Require the creation of public use space through redevelopment.** Growth and redevelopment can and should result in better public use space for existing and new residents.
12. **Promote development which, at a minimum, does not degrade existing environmental conditions.** Encourage establishment of a City-wide monitoring system to assess the effectiveness of forestry, storm water management, and other environmental programs' overall impact. Where needed, evolve environmental programs to better achieve positive results. Acknowledge impacts of redevelopment on urban wildlife and mature trees (native trees, in particular). In the Pike area specifically, where there are few remaining natural areas to preserve, maintain mature wildlife habitat components or create new ones whose existence provides excellent open space, recreational opportunities, and reduces pollution.
13. **Strategically locate and right-size parking.** This plan locates most parking in structures behind or under buildings, thereby minimizing inactive zones and reducing the visually unappealing effect of large surface lots in front of buildings. The plan also encourages less parking over time, as the area becomes more pedestrian-friendly.

THE IMPORTANCE OF IMPLEMENTING THE PLAN

This plan incorporates numerous concepts that were part of the 1989 *Rockville Pike Corridor Neighborhood Plan*. These concepts include creating service roads parallel to the Pike, expanding the street network, establishing a build-to line along Rockville Pike, encouraging a mix of uses, and making the Pike more attractive. Nonetheless, there are many reasons why an update to the 1989 plan is needed:

- Problems identified in the 1989 plan remain – mobility, safety, appearance, function and the experience of being on the Pike continue to be inadequate.
- Development interest is ripening near the Twinbrook Metro Station. This plan focuses on improving walkability and access to transit.
- The current roadway system is close to saturation at peak periods. Traffic congestion will continue to get worse, given the development that is planned for north and south of Rockville, whether or not any new development occurs

within Rockville. There is a need for a more efficient Pike design, expanded road network, improved transit, and much better conditions for walking and biking to provide people with options for getting around.

- Rockville needs to define its place in the context of competition that is coming from beyond its borders. The Pike neighborhood is important to the City's fiscal health and is economically significant to Rockville and the region. Overall, the Pike is prosperous today, but Rockville must consider how it can continue to compete successfully over the next 20 to 30 years.
- Developing a new plan for the neighborhood is an essential component of the process to manage change within the City, address pressures from development north and south of Rockville, manage the impacts of external development on Rockville's infrastructure, and create a unique identity, distinguishable from other corridors.
- Much of the built environment along the Pike is aging, bland, and designed primarily to accommodate cars. Increased congestion can be slowed by making the corridor a pleasant place to walk and an appealing destination rather than just a series of shopping centers that can only be accessed by car.
- Montgomery County's proposal for a Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) system that would likely include a route along MD 355 has a potentially enormous impact on this area, as do the adopted White Flint Sector Plan (2010) and the upcoming White Flint II Plan for the area to Rockville's immediate south. Given these significant impacts, which were not part of the reality of the Pike when the 1989 plan was adopted, Rockville needs an updated adopted vision for its portion of the corridor.

There is a need for a clear vision for the neighborhood for the coming decades. The alternative is no vision for a better functioning, more attractive, vibrant corridor; no opportunity to create parks; and more traffic congestion produced by development outside of Rockville that is beyond Rockville's control.

Implementing this plan will require strong cooperation among the City, Montgomery County, the State of Maryland, the private sector, and other organizations. It will also require a careful evaluation of appropriate funding mechanisms and options, with the understanding that Rockville must work proactively and collaboratively with other entities to fund and build infrastructure. The City will need to revise development regulations that present impediments to full implementation of the plan vision and advocate for components of the plan that are outside of its control.

IMPLEMENTATION STEPS

The action steps are discussed in detail in Chapter 5 and are summarized below:

General Policy Elements

1. Maintain strong regional partnerships
2. Ensure adequate infrastructure and community facilities
3. Advocate for components of the plan that are outside of Rockville's direct control
4. Focus on place-making near the Twinbrook Metro Station early in the life of the plan
5. Develop cost estimates and funding strategies
6. Monitor progress and stay relevant to changing conditions

Implement the Transportation Policies

1. Re-design and reconstruct Rockville Pike as a multi-way boulevard
2. Expand the street network
3. Optimize access to and use of transit
4. Expand Transportation Demand Management (TDM) activities
5. Strive to refine methodologies for measuring transportation mode share and addressing congestion management

Implement the Land Use Policies

1. Adopt the Rockville Pike District Code
2. Revise development regulations and standards
3. Make the Pike an inviting, walkable place
4. Acquire parkland

These action steps bring to light the complexity of implementing the plan for the corridor. Implementing this plan in full will require a high level of collaboration between the City, other jurisdictions, and the private sector over decades. Certain components will also require appropriate funding mechanisms and commitments. Finally, implementation will require seizing opportunities, overcoming obstacles, and thoughtful timing.

CONCLUSION

The Rockville Pike neighborhood can be more than a shopping location. It can be a great boulevard that serves both local and regional needs and wants, and can enhance its already central role in the economy of Rockville and Montgomery County. This plan seeks to achieve this vision.